

White House Names AIDS Expert Debbie Birx To Help Lead Coronavirus Response (*NPR, Science Speaks*)

[NPR](#) (2/27, Ordoñez) reports the White House named Debbie Birx “as its new coronavirus response coordinator.” Birx is “an internationally recognized HIV/AIDS expert” and “a State Department ambassador-at-large who works on global health diplomacy issues.” The article adds that “Vice President Pence said Birx would be detailed to his office,” and “Birx will also join Trump’s coronavirus task force, led by Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, which is charged with responding to the virus.” IDSA’s [Science Speaks](#) (2/27, Barton) blog reports that in comparison to Vice President Pence, Birx “has had more success in the public health arena, following data, and applying science-driven responses over six years of heading the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief efforts that have turned the trajectory of HIV epidemics worldwide.” The blog post says that “if her appointment to this new role brings confidence, it also brings concern about the work that continues to control HIV globally, although, the announcement today says, she ‘will continue to oversee this critical work,’ through a deputy.”

Yes, There’s Now A Code For Coronavirus. Plus Emergency Doctors, Nurses Say More Resources Needed (*FierceHealthcare*)

[FierceHealthcare](#) (2/27, Finnegan) reports, “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) National Center for Health Statistics will implement a new ICD-10 diagnosis code for the 2019 novel coronavirus, which has officially been named COVID-19, effective with the next coding update on Oct. 1, according to an [announcement](#) (pdf)” from the CDC. The new “emergency code – U07.1, 2019-nCoV acute respiratory disease – was established by the World Health Organization (WHO) in an emergency meeting late” in January.

Hospitals, Public Health Agencies Ration Masks As Supplies Are Exhausted (*Wall Street Journal & 4 Others*)

Hospitals and public health agencies are selectively providing medical masks and searching for more as concerns over the coronavirus outbreak have exhausted global supplies, with manufacturers warning it will take months to replace them, the [Wall Street Journal](#) (2/27, Evans, Hinshaw) reports. The CDC urged people not to wear masks unless told to by a physician. [Bloomberg Law](#) (2/27) reports FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn said in a statement: “At this time we are not aware of shortages of medical products, including drugs, medical devices and biologics, due to the COVID-19 outbreak.” [Bloomberg](#) (2/27, Crooks) and [Modern Healthcare](#) (2/27) also report on the shortage of masks. *Exclusive: U.S. Mulls Using Sweeping Powers To Ramp Up Production Of Coronavirus Protective Gear.* [Reuters](#) (2/27, Hesson, Alper) reports the Trump Administration is considering using “the Defense Production Act to rapidly expand domestic manufacturing of protective masks and clothing to combat the coronavirus in the United States, two U.S. officials told Reuters.” The article says that “the law grants the president the power to expand industrial production of key materials or products for national security and other reasons.”

U.S. Health Secretary Says At Least 40 Labs Can Currently Test For Coronavirus (*Reuters, CIDRAP*)

[Reuters](#) (2/27, Erman) reports HHS Secretary Alex Azar “said that at least 40 public health labs can currently test specimens for coronavirus and that could more than double as soon as tomorrow.” In addition, Azar “said a newly manufactured CDC test can be sent to 93 public health labs as soon as Monday, and a privately manufactured test based on the new CDC test could be sent to those same labs as early as tomorrow, pending FDA clearance.” [CIDRAP](#) (2/27, Soucheray) also covers the story.

CDC To Test More Suspected Cases Of Coronavirus After Revising Guidelines (*CNBC, The Hill*)

“The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it revised its guidelines on Thursday to allow clinicians across the U.S. to test more people suspected of carrying the new coronavirus,” [CNBC](#) (2/27, Feuer, Stankiewicz) reports. The revision comes after the CDC “initially declined to test a California patient for coronavirus because of narrow testing criteria, delaying the identification of a new possibly pivotal case, according to officials at the hospital treating the patient,” [The Hill](#) (2/27, Sullivan) reports.

The US Has Its First Novel Coronavirus-Related Drug Shortage (*CNN*)

[CNN](#) (2/28, Christensen) reports that the US “has its first novel coronavirus-related drug shortage, according to the” FDA. According to CNN, “The maker of an unnamed drug that has recently been added to the FDA Drug Shortages list told the agency that the shortage is due to the novel coronavirus.” CNN adds, “The unnamed company that notified the FDA about a shortage said the problem is the result of an issue with the manufacturing of an active pharmaceutical ingredient used in the drug.”

Azar Changes Tune: Says HHS Will Ensure Affordable Coronavirus Drugs (*Inside Health Policy & 4 Others*)

[Inside Health Policy](#) (2/27, Wilkerson) reports behind a paywall that HHS Secretary Alex Azar changed his stance on Thursday when he told members of a House committee that “coronavirus drugs and vaccines developed with the help of government funding will be affordable to all Americans.” Azar, who told a different House committee on Wednesday that the Administration couldn’t control the price of a vaccine because of private sector investment, said during a House Ways and Means Committee hearing on Thursday: “I’ve directed my teams, that if we do any joint venture with a private enterprise that we’re co-funding the research and development of the program, that we would ensure that there’s affordable access to the fruits of that, whether vaccine or therapeutics.” [CQ Roll Call](#) (2/27, Lerman, Siddons) reports House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-NY) “issued a statement Thursday saying any bill must include a guarantee that ‘vaccines are affordable and available to all that need it.’” Among other media outlets providing coverage are: [Bloomberg](#) (2/26), [Forbes](#) (2/27, Togoh), and [STAT](#) (2/27, Silverman).

Coronavirus In N.Y.: Growing Anxiety As Doctors Prepare For An Epidemic (*New York Times*)

The [New York Times](#) (2/27, Goldstein, McKinley) reports “some hospitals in New York City have begun safeguarding their stockpiles of masks and other protective gear amid suspicions that employees were taking them home. ... Although no one in New York has tested positive for the [coronavirus], doctors and public health officials in the city and state, amid growing anxiety, have been bracing for the possibility of an epidemic that could strain the health care system.”

California Monitoring 8,400 People For Coronavirus (*The Hill*)

[The Hill](#) (2/27, Sullivan) reports California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced that 33 people in the state have tested positive for coronavirus and health officials are “monitoring more than 8,400 people for the virus.” Newsom also “said...that five people who tested positive have since moved out of the state as officials deal with the spreading virus.”

Amazon Bars One Million Products For False Coronavirus Claims (*Reuters, CNBC*)

Amazon.com is cracking down on more than 1 million products over concerns that they had “inaccurately claimed to cure or defend against the coronavirus,” [Reuters](#) (2/27, Dastin) reports. Amazon “also removed tens of thousands of deals from merchants that it said attempted to price-gouge customers.”

[CNBC](#) (2/27, Palmer) also reports.

Opinion: Coronavirus And Its Global Sweep Stokes Fear Over Facts. Experts Say It's Unlikely To Produce 'Apocalyptic Scenario' (*USA Today*)

"Coronavirus is in the global spotlight, but a secondary character in this unfolding drama threatens to upstage the grim protagonist: fear," [USA Today](#) (2/27, Cava) reports. One expert "says one way to keep fear in check is to narrow your information stream to just-the-facts sources such as state medical agencies and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention." This also means not relying on social media for SARS-CoV-2 updates "given its always-on nature and the way online conversations tend to mimic that distorting game of telephone."

